

Laser Standard, RYA Youth Nationals, Plas Heli, 2–8 April

By Matt Whitfield

The build up to the RYA Youth Nationals, the first major event of the year, began as people started arriving from Wednesday onwards to try and hone their skills and get used to the conditions in North Wales. Showers and light winds prevailed on these days. Many people enjoyed the conditions as they had not experienced that weather all winter such is the British winter we all love to hate. A new hot topic of conversation was of what sail to use due to both the Mk1 and Mk2 sails being allowed in the event. The general consensus was that the Mk1 would be the weapon of choice due to familiarity. However, some in the fleet bucked the trend and went for the Mk2.

Day 1

Day 1 and we were all full of optimism and expectation, but the event was not able to get underway due to no wind. As the day progressed, the wind started to pulse in until 5–7knts arrived on the race course and at 3pm the fleet launched to start at 4pm.

Race 1 saw Jack Cookson, fresh from winning the final Qualifier, lead off the pin and all the way up the beat. Unfortunately for Ross Mackley, in the trigger pull his lower section snapped forcing him to retire and head in to get a new section. Down at the gate, Sam Whaley rounded the other gate, with some breeze and shift, and hopped into the lead. However, Cookson then re-overtook to win the race and leave Whaley in second.

Race 2 started in dying breeze and carried on dropping off until there was very little wind at all with the race becoming a drifter, and up the second beat, the Race Officer hoisted the N flag and sent the fleet ashore.

After racing, the fleet spoke about the two different sails and thought the Mk2 had the ability to climb a bit higher upwind without losing any speed giving it a slight upwind VMG advantage.

Day 2 dawned with 12–15knts on race course. Hamish Eckstein led around the course in Race 2 to take the bullet and Whaley was second in very tricky conditions – with massive gust and shift ranges making it hard to pick the way up the beat and runs.

In Race 3 the wind started to drop and Harry Blowers led by ten boat lengths to the gate with a bunch of five close behind. However, with the heating of the land, it became more unpredictable with many artificial lead changes until Whaley got a left shift and came through to round first with the bunch more spread out. Eckstein got into second down the final run.

On the first beat in Race 4, a left shift was called to perfection by Ed Higson which meant he led to the first mark, but a huge left shift on beat two meant Joe Mullan and Sam Whaley made huge gains on left to get into the top positions at the finish.

The thoughts on the sails were that in the conditions there was no noticeable speed differences between the two.

Day 3

Over the Tannoy it was announced there was 17–19knts on the race course at the start of day 3. In sync with the fleet being released, this increased to 24knts with gusts up to 37knts and a large cross swell and many of the fleet swimming. A few seconds before the start AP was displayed, minutes later AP/H went up and it was a reach with the waves back to the beach. Soon after we got in it was AP/A.

In pre-race tuning the Mk2 sail appeared to fold out well and didn't seem to be overpowered compared to Mk1. Again, there was no speed difference observed.

Day 4

With four races scheduled the fleet was held on shore with Ap/3 making the scheduled start 2pm. The fleet headed out to the race course in about 15–20knts. With big shifts and pressure differences on the course and many big gusts coming in from the right-hand side, timing of leverage was crucial. In races five and six, Anthony Parke and

Jack Aitken showed the fleet how to sail in these conditions by sharing the spoils with a first and a second each. There were many tight battles behind them due to the multitude of overtaking lanes on and off the wind. For the final two races, the wind moderated somewhat with some patches of stronger breeze still coming down from Llanbedrog. Over the next two races, Anthony Parke continued to show the fleet his transom with another second and first with Harry Blowers winning race three.

The wind, waves and shifty conditions meant that everybody was truly exhausted at the end of the day with a reward of the tide back in for the boats to be pulled up the beach due to the 7.30 arrival back to shore!

Day 5

The final day dawned with many of the main rivals still in contention. Anthony Parke held a lead over Sam Whaley, and Harry Blowers was still able to take the title with the added complication of the second discard coming in after the first race of the day. It was all to play for with two races scheduled and an earlier 10.25am start.

The fleet launched in a 5–7knt dying breeze with an Ap hoisted due to the lack of wind. Thankfully, soon after the breeze swung around and built quickly until it was 10knts at the start time and some decent waves were starting to roll in.

In the first race, Jack Aitken made the most of a right shift to lead around the course followed by Anthony Parke, who capsized on the final run to allow Harry Blowers to sneak through and come second across the line.

For the final race of the regatta, Parke decided the best course of action was to engage in a match race with Whaley and from the preparatory signal started the hunt. In the end, both got off the line cleanly right at the pin end of the line with Parke to windward. While the rest of the fleet sailed up the course, the two overall leaders headed off to the left-hand side and Whaley managed to wriggle free to get a left shift and lead into the top mark with Parke in the pack and spinning for touching the mark. Over the next legs, Parke sailed like a man who wasn't going to give an inch working his way through the fleet with speed and tactical nous to take second in the race on the final run and, as a result, first overall by two points.

Overall, the Mk1 and Mk2 performed very similarly throughout the week with the sails similar in speed in over 12knts. However, as the wind got lighter, the Mk2 seemed to gain a slight advantage. Interestingly, the top three all used the Mk1, with the top Mk2 sailor being Oliver Davenport in 8th.

The event was run superbly considering the tough conditions faced by all at the RYA off the water and on the water led by race officer Charlie Stowe.

Results:

- 1 Anthony Parke (18pts)
- 2 Sam Whaley (20pts)
- 3 Harry Blowers (32pts)